

Subject: Scottish MPs, demand that the detention of families with children must stop

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Scottish MPs, demand that the detention of families with children must stop

Scottish Parliamentary visit to Dungavel Removal Centre - 16 April 2002

On the afternoon of Wednesday 16 April 2002, a delegation from the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Refugees and Asylum seekers consisting of Dennis Canavan MSP, Shona Robison MSP, Tommy Sheridan MSP, Graham Blount, the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer, Rosemary Burnett of Amnesty International, Sophia Marriage of the Scottish Refugee Council and Cate Nicholl Parliamentary assistant, made a visit to Dungavel Removal Centre near Strathaven.

In principle, the cross party group has stated its opposition to detention centres because they do not believe that it is right to detain people who have committed no crime. It is also goes against Scots law that people are detained indefinitely with no idea of how long they will be held for.

They were asked to visit Dungavel Removal Centre due to concerns raised about the detention of families at Dungavel; the length of time people were being detained and highly publicised concerns about conditions at the centre and the way detainees were being treated.

At the end of the visit they felt they were justified in their opposition to Removal Centres and were even more strongly of the view that families with children should not be detained

Some extracts:

There is limited provision of education for children but this is no substitute for a normal school environment.

Children must pass through locked doors to get outside and currently there is no play area even when they do get outside,

We can see no justification for the detention of children. The risk of absconding does not outweigh the damage done to children being denied their freedom.

The lack of accountability for service provision by Premier must be addressed.

The length of time asylum seekers are detained for is of concern. Dungavel is supposed to be a removal centre, designed for a short-term period of detention. We are concerned that some people have been detained for long periods, in one case for 18 months, in detention centres throughout the UK. This can only have a detrimental impact on the mental health of detainees, whom we should always remember, have committed no crime.

We are concerned that there may be detainees, who are being held in Dungavel without good grounds, given so many we spoke to were not at the end of the asylum appeal process, and many told us they had been living in the community, some for years, without absconding.

The lack of information available about detainees is cause for concern.

The lack of accessible information regarding legal representation and support must be addressed. If neither